



Transformed Character

“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Ephesians 4:1).



This teaching outline was developed in support of the resource, *Transforming Love*, for small groups. Check out this resource and many others today at: greatcommandment.net/resources

“I pray that...you will know... the riches of the glory of His [Jesus’] inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:18).

I. INTRODUCTION: WALK IN A WORTHY MANNER

Walking in a manner worthy of our calling requires that we exercise ourselves unto godliness (1 Timothy 4:7). We must spiritually train ourselves to hear and yield as God reveals Himself through His Son, His Word, and His people:

- Fresh encounters with Christ through prayer, meditation, and worship will become frequent.
- We will long to spend time in the Word, allowing the Spirit to plant its truths deep within us before we seek to teach and admonish others (Colossians 3:16).
- Fellowship with God’s people will become a priority as the Spirit reveals Himself through loving brothers and sisters in Christ who are partnering together to fulfill their Great Commission purpose.

This walk in the light of God’s Son, His Word, and His saints not only keeps us from being overtaken by darkness (John 12:35), but it also transforms us into the image of Jesus. Through every relationship, situation, triumph, and tragedy in our lives, the Spirit is at work to conform us to the likeness of Christ.

A story is told of Michelangelo unveiling a beautiful sculpture which depicted angelic glory. When asked how he could capture such splendor and divine mystery in his work, the artist responded simply, “From the block of common and flawed marble, I chip away everything that doesn’t look like an angel!” It is this very work that the Spirit does in us as we encounter divine reality in God’s Word, embrace life-changing intimacy with His Son, and experience the wonder of His love through His saints. Everything in us that does not look like Christ is chipped away—such is the mystery of spiritual transformation.

“So it is written: ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam, a life giving spirit . . . And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven”
(1 Corinthians 15:45, 49).

II. TRANSFORMED CHARACTER RESTORING GOD’S PLAN

God’s original design for our character was rejected by Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. As descendants of Adam, we bore his likeness, a likeness which had become a distortion of God’s image. But as we walk in God’s light, we are transformed into the likeness of “*the last Adam*,” Jesus Christ. In the remainder of this sermon, we will explore three aspects of Christlikeness—humility, faith, and gratitude—each of which is essential to the Father’s divine plan for restoring what was lost in the fall.

A. God’s Desire to Restore What His People Lost in the Fall

What did the “*first Adam*” lose through sin that the “*second Adam*,” Jesus, desires to restore by His Spirit through you and me?

As a result of the fall, all descendants of Adam enter the world with a corrupt nature. Adam and Eve’s sin brought sin to all humankind: “*Therefore, . . . sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned*” (Romans 5:12). After the fall, inclinations and passions which were once directed toward God were directed away from and even against Him. Thoughts which were once pure and God-focused became wicked and unsettled. Willful obedience gave way to blatant rebellion. Humankind thus became hindered in carrying out its ultimate purpose: expressing the presence and glory of God.

The remainder of the Old Testament chronicles the painful results of the fall, but it is also filled with promises and prophecies of a coming restoration. Through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, these promises found their fulfillment, ushering in the hope that the Creator’s initial and ultimate purpose for His created might be effectively accomplished.

As children of God and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17), we have again been entrusted with the task of extending God’s presence. In order to fulfill this calling, we must recapture the characteristics which originally defined the relationship between God and humanity: **humble dependence**, which acknowledges our need for God’s caring provision; **expectant faith**, which declares our confidence in His trustworthiness; and **abundant gratitude**, which gives witness to His bountiful blessings. This restoration of humility, faith, and gratitude will serve as the platform for our witness to God’s glory.

B. Humility Restored

At the fall, humble dependence was abandoned: “*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it*” (Genesis 3:6). In one of the saddest moments in human history, Eve, who was created to receive all she needed from the hand of her loving and gracious Creator, took the fruit and ate it.

Never before had Adam or Eve taken. They had trusted God to address their inherent neediness as humans and had freely received His provision. Yet because of Satan's temptation, Adam and Eve selfishly and greedily took for the first time. Tragically, they discovered that taking the fruit did not fulfill their longings. Indeed, it led only to shame, guilt, fear, and an eagerness to dodge blame for their actions.

Nevertheless, the damage was done—humans ceased being grateful recipients and became takers. Selfish taking can never truly satisfy our God-created neediness. The cry of the human heart since the fall has consistently been, "It's not enough!" God's desire is to send us as ambassadors to this world full of self-focused, dissatisfied people so that we might give witness to His loving care and provision through renewed humility.

C. Humility Expressed Through Dependence

Imagine you are one of the twelve disciples. You have left everything to follow Jesus, entrusting your life and future to this carpenter from Nazareth. Your hopes are riding on an unclear vision of His plans for a "kingdom." It is becoming increasingly clear that your Jewish leaders are not big fans of His. In fact, they are trying to kill Him and maybe you too!

Now imagine your reaction as you hear Jesus say: "*I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself*" (John 5:19). Are you surprised by this declaration of humble dependence? Surely this One whom you are following has some kind of plan, right? Doesn't He enjoy some sense of security about the future? Are you a bit shocked when you hear Him essentially say, "I just wait around for the Father to show Me what to do?"

Jesus' words, startling though they may be, provide the blueprint for our lives. We are called to express humility through complete dependence upon God. Faithful, maturing disciples who walk intimately with the Spirit are able to declare, as Christ did, "*By myself I can do nothing*" (John 5:30).

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D. Humility Displayed Through Vulnerability

A second way in which we are to demonstrate humility is by being honest and transparent regarding our hearts and our pain. Jesus modeled this kind of vulnerability as He expressed His compassion (Matthew 9:36), shared His sorrow (Matthew 26:38), and wept openly for His friends (John 11:35).

In addition, we must demonstrate vulnerability concerning our faults and sins, confessing them both to God and to one another (1 John 1:9; James 5:16). The appropriate and prayerful sharing of our failures with our spouses, friends, prayer partners, or small groups helps to bring all things into the light of God's Truth and grace. Such openness produces accountability before God and others, allowing us to walk worthy in a wicked and perverse world (Ephesians 4:1).

Similarly, each time we approach God's Word, we should first lay our lives vulnerably before the Lord, yielding to His Spirit and allowing His Word to dwell deeply within us (Colossians 3:16). Then, as we teach and admonish others, we should vulnerably disclose what God has revealed to us and done in us as we have encountered Him in His Word. Every sermon, lesson, small group meeting, or one-to-one conversation should include our vulnerable testimony to the Holy Spirit's gracious, patient, and fresh work in us.

E. Humility Expressed Through Approachability

Jesus demonstrated approachability to outcasts and sinners (Luke 7:36–50), lepers (Luke 17:11–19), the demon-possessed (Mark 5:1–20), children (Matthew 19:13–15), and commoners (Matthew 9:20–22). He never used His perfect knowledge, His miraculous power, or His ever-increasing ministry responsibilities as excuses for distancing Himself from others. Faithful followers of Christ will likewise guard themselves against arrogance, aloofness, and the trappings of "big-time ministry" that so often rob us of humble approachability.



L2. Listening to and hearing God for direction and discernment

Colossians 3:16 Moment:
"Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you."

Pastor/Teacher:

Pause during this time and complete these sentences for yourself and then share your answers with the congregation.

Experience Scripture

"We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you"
(2 Chronicles 20:12).

Have you ever experienced a time, like King Jehoshaphat, when you were surrounded by obstacles? Can you remember an occasion when, not knowing what to do or where to go, you turned your eyes toward God? Maybe you were going through a time when...

- *You needed provision.*
- *You suffered a tragic loss.*
- *You faced great uncertainty about the future.*
- *You needed clear direction.*
- *You felt helpless.*

Perhaps you are even going through a time like this right now.

Complete whichever of the two following sentences is most appropriate for you at this time:

- *I remember when _____, and I was completely dependent on God.*

For example: *I remember when I was laid off from my job. I could not find work for six months, and I was completely dependent on God.*

- *The encouragement I have received from _____ has challenged me to be more encouraging in these ways: _____.*

For example: *Right now, I need to depend completely on God concerning my oldest child. He is very sick, but the doctors cannot seem to determine what the illness is.*

“The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God”
(Galatians 2:20).

Throughout the Old Testament, faithful followers of God brought pleasure to their Creator by demonstrating faith in the face of difficult circumstances.

III. FAITH RESTORED

At the fall, Satan undermined expectant faith: *“You will not surely die, the serpent said to the woman”* (Genesis 3:4). Adam and Eve’s faith was attacked as God’s truth was questioned. Faith comes through hearing and accepting God’s Word (Romans 10:17), and it is threatened when His Word is devalued, ignored, or denied.

Prior to the fall, God’s provision of air, food, water, and relationships (to name just a few of His blessings) simply served as a reminder to Adam and Eve that God was the appropriate object of their faith, and that they should keep their eyes and hearts fixed on Him. When Eve gave heed to the serpent and questioned the truth of what God had said, her faith (and Adam’s in turn) was weakened. The restoration of expectant faith to the lives of His people has been on God’s heart ever since.

A. Faith in the Old Testament

Beginning almost immediately after the fall, the Father began to nurture the damaged faith of His children. Though Adam and Eve’s descendants never experienced the perfect faith that their ancestors had originally enjoyed in the garden, many of them, nonetheless, brought pleasure to their Creator by demonstrating a measure of faith. By faith, Abel offered a sacrifice pleasing to God, Enoch walked with God, Noah built the ark, and Abraham followed God toward an unknown destination (Hebrews 11:4–8). Throughout the Old Testament, obedient followers of God exhibited faith in the face of difficult circumstances.

Of course, the Old Testament is also full of instances in which people failed to demonstrate faith in God’s provision: Sarah laughed at God’s promise of a son (Genesis 18:10–12); the children of Israel feared that God would let them die in the wilderness (Exodus 14:10–12); the ten spies insisted they could not possess the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:26–33); and Jonah ran from the Lord rather than trusting His instructions (Jonah 1:1–3). For humankind to experience more mature faith, they would first have to encounter One who modeled perfect faith.

B. Faith in the New Testament

Jesus, the *“second Adam,”* practiced the perfect faith that the first Adam lost. As recounted in the Gospels, Christ consistently demonstrated confidence in God’s power and provision. One clear example of the Son’s faith in the Father is found in the account of the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:1–44). After assuring Mary and Martha that their brother would live again, Jesus paused in the midst of the crowd and publicly thanked God for the miracle of Lazarus’ resurrection, before it had even occurred (John 41–42)! Expectant faith in the Father was a constant theme in Christ’s life, ministry, and miracles. Even as He drew His last breath, Jesus demonstrated faith by committing His spirit to the Father’s care (Luke 23:46).

The perfect faith that Jesus modeled inspired His followers to exercise expectant faith as well. Following the ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciples' faith, which had been tried greatly following the crucifixion, continued to grow and strengthen, and they soon began to perform miracles of healing and deliverance just as Jesus had. The remainder of the New Testament bears witness to the power of the faith that comes through knowing Christ.

C. Characteristics of Genuine Faith

■ Faith is expectant.

Faithful followers of God fully expect Him to show up. They remain mindful of the ways in which He has provided and intervened in the past, being careful to *"forget none of His benefits"* (Psalm 103:2). Faith-filled disciples declare what can happen, what God can do, rather than focusing on all the reasons why things will not work out.

■ Faith is unshakeable.

Genuine faith is undergirded by a firm confidence in the Father's love. Mature disciples of Christ follow His leading until they can no longer clearly see the path ahead of them. At which point, genuine faith prompts and empowers them to take the next step. Anxiety, worry, and fear give way to the peace that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). Upon what foundation does such unshakeable faith rest? It rests upon the simple truth that the heavenly Father knows what we need (Matthew 6:32). Since He knows, and we know He cares, we can be at peace, believing in faith that He will guide and protect us.

■ Faith is sacrificial.

In stark contrast to the first Adam's selfish taking, the last Adam willingly laid down His life for others, believing by faith that the Father would bring forth unimaginable good through His sacrifice. Likewise, faith-filled followers of Jesus are confident that their heavenly Father is thinking of and caring for them. As maturing disciples, they are free to think of and care for others. The temptation to fearfully take is replaced by the desire to graciously give, and the self-centered life gives way to one in which the Holy Spirit often whispers, "It's not about you—it's about Him!"



M6. Bearing witness of a confident peace and expectant hope in God's Lordship in all things

Engage Community

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for" (Hebrews 11:1–2).

Recall again Christ's gathering with His followers in the upper room. It is only hours before His betrayal, torment, and death. Soon, He will become sin at Calvary.

Colossians 3:16 Moment:
"Let the Word of Christ dwell
deeply in you."

Pastor/Teacher:

Pause during this time and
complete this sentence for
yourself then share your
answer with the congregation.

Notice:

- **His expectant faith:** "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God..." (John 13:3).
 - Notice where His focus *is not*: He is not focused on self, circumstances, or what He does not have.
 - Notice where His focus *is*: He is focused on His Father and on what the Father has given Him and promised Him.

How might your own focus need to change in order to encourage the development of mature faith?

It will be important for my focus to move from _____ to _____ as the Spirit reminds me of _____.

For example: *It will be important for my focus to move from what I wish I had—such as more money or a better job—to gratefulness for all God has provided as the Spirit reminds me of God's total faithfulness to meet all my needs.*

- **His unshakeable faith:** He displays no anxiety about the circumstance in which He finds Himself—no fears concerning the future, no worries about what others might do.

What anxieties or worries might you need to be freed from as you experience the Spirit's refining work of faith in you?

I need the Spirit to deepen my faith so that I might be freed from anxiety and worry concerning _____.

For example: *I need the Spirit to deepen my faith so that I might be freed from anxiety and worry concerning how we are going to make ends meet once the baby is born.*

- **His sacrificial faith:** "[Jesus] got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded" (John 13:4–5).

In the final hours of His earthly life, as Jewish leaders plot His death, Jesus Christ, being well aware of His true identity, calling, and destiny, focuses on those nearest Him. He takes on the role of the lowest servant and washes their feet.

What sacrifices might others need from you? Who might you be able to serve as you grow in mature faith?

As my confidence in God's care and provision grows, I will be freed to sacrificially serve _____ by _____.

For example: *As my confidence in God's care and provision grows, I will be freed to sacrificially serve: my roommates by helping to clean our place, my husband by saving money on our grocery spending, my wife by taking the kids for a few hours to give her a break.*

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After sharing your responses with your partner or small group, pray together a prayer of faith, claiming the simple but profound promise that *“Your heavenly Father knows . . .”* (Matthew 6:32).

As you pray:

Trust that He knows.

Trust that He cares.

Trust that because He cares, you need not be anxious.

Trust that, as you ask according to His will, He hears, and you will have what you request (1 John 5:14–15).

“For Christ’s love compels us”
(2 Corinthians 5:14).

“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17).

IV. GRATITUDE RESTORED

Concerning the tree which was in the middle of the garden of Eden, God told Adam, *“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die”* (Genesis 2:17). Satan, seizing on this command, launched a sly, cunning attack that was aimed at undermining Adam and Eve’s gratitude toward God.

Notice the subtlety of the serpent’s approach: He began by simply asking Eve, *“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’* Eve replied, *“We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”* Satan immediately retorted, *“You will not surely die . . . when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God”* (Genesis 3:1–3).

Notice how Satan’s words implied that Adam and Eve had *needs* beyond those things which Jehovah Jireh had committed to provide. Essentially, he was saying, “Eve, you need to be able to eat from all the trees—you need to be like God. What kind of God would not let you eat from any tree in the garden? What kind of God would put a tree there and then say ‘Don’t eat from it’?”

For the first time, Eve’s focus shifted from all the abundance which was hers to the one thing that was forbidden. By shifting her focus from what she had to what was prohibited, Satan was able to convince her to embrace lies concerning God’s character, leading her to believe that her Creator was stingy and unnecessarily restrictive rather than generous and full of grace. Abandoning their gratitude, Adam and Eve selfishly took from the fruit of the tree, and true to God’s word, they died—instantly in spirit and eventually in body as well.

A. The Transforming Power of Gratitude

In our day, have we not been subjected to this same subtle attack? Does gratefulness for the infinite love of Christ empower us, or have we bought into the lie that we have needs for which God is not committed to provide?

What prompts our witness, encourages our service, and enlists our commitment? Is it merely a sense of our duty to live up to others’ expectations? Is it a sense of obligation, a feeling that we must somehow pay God back in some measure for the forgiveness and love we have received?

May it never be! The maturing disciple's heart will be prompted often by the Holy Spirit to thank God for the privilege of co-laboring with the Creator and the awesome truth that we get to relate intimately with Christ.

This ever-deepening gratitude prompts faithful disciples to . . .

- Remember and give thanks for all the benefits and blessings of God (Psalm 103:2).
- Frequently enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise (Psalm 100:4).
- Have inexpressible joy, even in the midst of a world filled with difficulties and pain (1 Peter 1:8).
- Endure all things, just as Christ did at Calvary (Hebrews 12:2–3).
- *“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power”* (Ephesians 6:10).
- Guard their hearts and minds against Satan's subtle lies with the peace that results from prayer and petition with thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6–7).



L10. Practicing the presence of the Lord, yielding to the Spirit's work of Christ-likeness

Encounter Jesus

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28).

Consider the story of Jesus' encounter with a Pharisee and a sinful woman as recorded in Luke 7:36–50. Think again about the importance of the Spirit's restoration to us of **humility, faith, and gratitude** and reflect on how each of these three characteristics is demonstrated in this story. Then read and meditate on the following:

It was a bad idea from the start. What made her think that she could slip into the room unnoticed? The people shuffled away from her. Their hateful glares made her cheeks blaze behind her veil. No matter how hard she tried to blend in, her very presence seemed to provoke the worst in every crowd. The furtive whispers and muffled laughter stoked the embers of her anger to a white-hot rage. Did they think she was stupid? Did they think she did not know that the jokes were about her?

Simon, the host for this gathering, was the most important Pharisee in the village. Ceremoniously, he followed the visiting Teacher into the room, quickly scanning around to make sure that all was in order. His eyes quickly locked on the woman—what was she doing here?

For an intense moment, she endured his glare. All ears strained in expectation of Simon's disgusted apology to his honored guest. The woman felt trapped, exposed. There was nothing to do but wait for Simon and his visitor to condemn her presence and her lifestyle. Her beating heart pounded as she stared at the floor. But no rebuke came.

Then she noticed the Teacher. "Why is he walking towards me?" she thought. Then she saw the look in His eyes. "He knows who I am!" she realized. "He knows what I have done! Why would He dare come near me? Why doesn't he act like the others?" As the teacher smiled at her, she suddenly realized that, for the first time since she was a little girl, she had met a man who saw her as she wanted to be and not as she had become.

The woman began to cry. "I have been forgiven," she thought. She sank to her knees as tears poured from her eyes, seemingly washing away decades of sin and hurt. Her tears fell on the dusty, calloused feet of the Teacher.

The crowd fell silent; only her sobbing could be heard. Those in the room waited to see what the One who was reported to be a prophet would do. If He was, surely He would not allow Himself to be approached so familiarly by a common prostitute!

However, Jesus did not move. His eyes also ran with tears. Then the most amazing thing occurred. Unashamedly, the woman removed her veil. Her dark hair cascaded onto the feet of Jesus, and she began to wash His dusty feet with tears and wipe them with her hair.

Her pocket held a small vial of perfume. She opened it, filling the air with a sweet aroma, and anointed the feet of the Teacher. Simon was filled with indignation. The Teacher's silence seemed to indicate His acceptance of the woman in spite of her sin. The flustered Pharisee demanded an explanation.

Jesus replied, *"Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little"* (Luke 7:44-46).

Christ's love compelled this woman to weep, to worship, to minister, to witness. It produced in her deep humility, faith, and gratitude. How about you? Have you had similar encounters with Him?

Lord, as I reflect on Your acceptance, forgiveness, and love of me, my heart is moved with _____. I am prompted to _____.

Share your responses with your partner or small group. Then pray for one another, asking that you each might respond to the infinite love of Jesus with humility, faith, and gratitude.

Colossians 3:16 Moment:

"Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you."

Pastor/Teacher:

Pause during this time and complete this sentence for yourself then share your answer with the congregation as an example of how they can be vulnerable in their small groups.
